Questions Put to Lanford Indicate That Investigation of Police Methods Is Being Conducted.

TORTURE ERA IS PAST, CHIEF INFORMS JURY

Science and Skill Now Employed by Detectives in Securing Confessions From Criminals, He Says.

The police "third degree," which has created such widespread discussion during the Mary Phagan murder investigation, has been thoroughly explained to the grand jury by Detective Chief Newport A. Lanford, who appeared before that body at its request.

Detective John Black, of headquarters, who has been an active figure in the Phagan case, is also said to have been quizzed about methods employed by the police and detectives. He will not talk of the subject. Members of the jury are reluctant to give any information.

Chief Lanford, however, willingly told a Constitution reporter of his testimony before the jury and of the nature of queries which were put to him. He says he gave a complete and apparently satisfactory account of the "third degree" and the manner in which it is practiced at police headquarters.

Is Jury Probing Police Methods?

The belief is prevalent in both police and court circles that a secret probe is being promoted by the grand jury into methods employed by both the police and detective departments, and that it was in pursuit of this investigation that the detective head and Black were examined. Chief Lanford is inclined to scout this theory, although he is unable to account for the testimony that was required of him and of Black in the "third degree" probe.

The use of the "third degree" during the Phagan mystery has caused much comment. Its most effective employment, it will be recalled, was in extracting three sensational confessions from the negro sweeper, James Conley. Newt Lee, the negro watchman,

the first suspect in the murder case, was subjected to a "degree" equally as strenuous.

The public letter of Mrs. Leo Frank, in which she took the detectives and Solicitor General Dorsey to task for subjecting her servant girl, Minola McKnight, to a system of cross-examination, which, she asserted, left the girl in a state of exhaustion, probably served to actuate the jury's inquiry into police methods. Mrs. Frank's letter was a stinging arraignment, and[…]

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CHIEF OF DETECTIVES BEFORE GRAND JURY

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[…]many other such letters have attacked the detectives and police severely.

Not a Torture Method.

Chief Lanford, in his talk, averred that the public has the wrong conception of the "third degree," and naturally pictured it as a torture method. This is wholly wrong, he declared, and utterly at variance with the explanation which he gave to the grand jury.

The "third degree," he told the jury, is one of the most valuable assets of the detective department, and without it many of a city's most glaring crimes would go forever unsolved. He admitted that in one era of police history the method has been barbarous, but declared that in the present day science and skill had replaced the torture of the past.

In Conley's case Chief Lanford told the jury the negro's confession had been secured through clever detective work in confronting him with damaging discrepancies in his stories of innocence. The method employed with him is a popular one and is a plan that has served successfully with negro criminals.

"It is worked in this manner," the chief said. "Only two men operate the scheme. They study their subject thoroughly by preliminary conversations, learn his traits of character and his

weak points. They they warm up to the real work—clamp down the screws, so to speak.

How Confession Is Secured.

"The first detective begins to taunt and deride the prisoner. He confronts him with all incriminating evidence gathered against him, pictures the form of punishment to which he is liable and vividly illustrates the fate of others in predicaments similar to the prisoner's. The detective attitude is threatening and belligerent. When the subject is worked up into a state of fear the belligerent examiner leaves the room in an assumed fit of anger.

"The second detective, who has quietly watched his fellow sleuth's operations, during which he has looked on, distinterestedly, takes up the ‘degree' where the other left off. He affects an entirely different attitude. He soothes the prisoner, encourages him and offers sympathy. His partner, he tells the prisoner, is quick of temper and is easily prejudiced.

"The prisoner is warned that the detective who threatened will strive to convict and is prevailed upon to confess in order to save himself from the vengeance of the sleuth who has just left the room. With assumed sympathy, encouragement and advice, the second detective almost invariably cajoles a confession from the ‘third degree' subject."

Different Treatment Needed.

With white prisoners the method is different. They are credulous and prejudiced against detectives and are keen to divine the false attitude of sympathy which wins so easily over the negro. The whites are subjected to an incessant volley of questions for many hours.

These methods are calculated to frazzle the nerves and drive the subject into admission. The duration of the "degree" is general the most effective phase of the entire examination. Under the severe mental pressure created by the constant necessity of having to meet the bombardment of questions with plausible

answers and the accompanying physical strain the guilty prisoner frequently reaches a point of exhaustion which forces confession.

The inocent [sic] subject is seldom forced to endure such methods. His innocence is easily divined by his frankness, his collaborative answers and his story. Guilt is quickly detected in even the shrewdest and most experienced of crooks. Even the best of rehearsed stories are often broken down under the strain of constant examination.

Series of Examinations.

As explained by Chief Lanford, the "third degree" is merely the last of a series of examinations. In the first degree the prisoner is allowed to tell his story without cross-examination. He signs a written statement, following which the detectives "run it down," finding whatever discrepancies they may and obtaining corroboration.

The second degree is for the purpose of confronting the subject with the fruits in his tale and the evidence unearthed against him. If he fails to confess in this stage of the examination he is forced to remain in solitude and confinement for hours, to meditate over the situation, sum up the probability of conviction and to consider the strain to which he will be subjected in the following degree, of which he has been made vividly aware during the previous examination.

The queries put to him by the grand jury, says the chief, were of a nature meant to ascertain whether or not the police methods were tortuous and whether or not they often resulted in prisoners making false confessions in order to escape suffering. The chief declares he informed the jury that the methods were not barbarous and that it was only the guilty who suffered and that they experienced suffering only through the mental strain which attended the necessity of having to answer volleys of questions with faked answers.

So far as is known the jury has taken no action regarding their investigation of police methods. Lanford expresses belief that

they were pleased with his explanation of the "third degree" and that they have learned definitely that it is only a method of science and not torture.